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Interview with Shirley Fishburne

Shirley Herlong Fishburne
SC Mother of the Year Committee

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Winthrop University
South Carolina Mother of the Year Award Oral History Archives
Interview Transcript
Shirley Fishburne
Treasurer of the SC Mother of the Year Committee

Dr. Disney: Good afternoon. My name is Dr. Jennifer Lee Disney and I am honored to be here interviewing Shirley Fishburne, chair and treasurer at different stages of her experience with the South Carolina Mother of the Year Association. Shirley, thank you so much for being here with us today.

Shirley Fishburne: Thank you Jennifer.

Dr. Disney: Why don't we start by asking you when and where you were born and raised?

Shirley Fishburne: I was born in Lumberton, North Carolina and my family moved to Manning, South Carolina when I was three years old. So if anybody asks me where I grew up, it's Manning, South Carolina – a very small town, southern part of the state. My father was a John Deere dealer so he had an opportunity to start a John Deere dealership in this agricultural area of our state and it was a very successful move for him. There were several lean years in the beginning. I was young then, but I was told they were lean. We had a wonderful – it was a wonderful place to grow up. We had a very small community, about 3,000 people.

Dr. Disney: Is there anything else you want to tell us about your family or your early childhood experience?

Shirley Fishburne: Well, I was really lucky because I was one of five children and I was the middle child, so I'm the one that should have all of the problems. But we were – it was just an Ozzie and Harriet kind of growing up. It really was. You know, we had a neighborhood and everybody played football in our backyard, or whatever the sport was. I have three brothers and a sister, so you know, it is just the best. We were a very close family. We were not without problems; every family has problems. My dad was an alcoholic and so we all had to deal with that, but we dealt with it and he got through it. He was very active in AA and I'm really proud of the work that he did in AA. He really was a strong person to be able to pull himself out of that. He was a very driven person, very strong, a very bright guy.

My mother never went to college. She was – she was the ultimate feminist. I know we are going to get to the feminism question. But I know my oldest brother has always said Mom was the most feminist person he had ever known. She had a – like I said she had five children – she had a children's store that she opened and ran while she was raising us. So she was really a business woman. She didn't have the college education and she always felt like she was inferior in some way; that she didn't have that education. But not many women were college educated then. She went to a secretarial school and she had those skills, but she was so, so bright. She was a wonderful mother, a wonderful mother. I'll give you one example. When I was growing up, I was a bit of a child prodigy because my musical talent was discovered pretty soon. Everybody has talents, but sometimes if you're a musician your talent is recognized more in the community, so I was. And I started playing the organ in my church when I was in the seventh grade and my piano teacher was my organ teacher. Now remember, this is a really small town. So my piano

teacher taught me everything she knew about the organ in about a year. She said, “I’m done, you’re going to have to go somewhere else.” So my mother found an organ teacher in Columbia, which was an hour and fifteen minute drive one way and took me to Columbia every other week with four other children at home for 5 years.

Dr. Disney: For five years, every other week to make sure you could get those lessons.

Shirley Fishburne: But she did that for every child. She was very determined that we were going to have every opportunity that we could. They were very proud of the fact that all five of us finished college. That was one thing that Mama said she absolutely wanted us to do. So there was no question that we were going to finish. And it was not one of those households that you’ve got to do your grades. There was just no question about whether you were going to do your grades. You were going to do the best you could and it was just expected. There were no threats. It was just expected. So we were all sort of Type A personalities I guess. And they always made a deal with us – said ok, college, we are going to put everybody through college, but after that you’re on your own. And all of us went on to further education. Education was very important in our household.

My daddy was on the schoolboard and in Manning – Manning is ten miles away from Somerton. Somerton, South Carolina was one of the communities that filed for Brown versus Board of Education. So that was a pivotal point in history and my father was very much a part of that. He was on the board of trustees – the school board rather – during that time and I remember him coming home from board meetings at one and two in the morning. And he said, “I don’t know what we’re going to do. We’ve got to do this.” And they worked through it and I was really proud of the way our community worked through it. I really was. It was a very interesting time, but I was a child so I could only see this through a child’s lens. But it was a fascinating time in our history and I was very, very proud of my father.

Dr. Disney: It sounds like your mom and your dad were big role models for you in terms of your adult development and when you became a mother I’m sure.

Shirley Fishburne: Absolutely.

Dr. Disney: Tell us anything else you want to share about your education and your young adult life and when you think back to your own education and that time in your life, what do remember were your dreams, goals, and aspirations at the time?

Shirley Fishburne: Like I said, I had this talent that was discovered early. I started piano lessons I think in fourth grade, maybe. I had one piano teacher. She was a Winthrop graduate and she was a second mother to me in a way. I remember I would always come home, I would go straight to her house for my piano lessons and her mother would feed me a meal, not a just snack, but a meal. But it was that kind of town, a small community that everybody looked out for each other. So Mrs. Holiday would feed my little snack, or a meal, whatever you want to call it and then I would go in for my piano lesson. My piano teacher taught me so much more than just music/ she was just a great guide for me. I had a wonderful Sunday school teacher. I grew up in the Presbyterian Church and she was a real role model for me. Ms. Sauls. Virginia Sauls. And she, I still got in my bible “MS” – it was for “Ms. Sauls.” You look at it like, “MS,” what does that mean? But it was – those were her favorite bible verses. But I can still hear her in my head. So

when Hillary Clinton says “it takes a village,” it really does because there were so many role models for me – not only my parents, but people in our community and our small community who were just – who raised us, who raised me. They were very, very important. And they continued that even when I left Manning. You know, when you grow up in a small town, those bonds are really strong. They really are.

When I was eighteen, I had decided to go to one school; you know you go through all of the college application stuff and I made my decision and I decided on one school. I got a full ride with music, you know the whole bet. I hadn’t really looked at Winthrop and I don’t know why and I don’t remember why. I don’t know if it was too far away from where I lived and you know, whatever reason it was. And in June, right before you would have started school in the fall, I got a call that said “you need to come up here and look at Winthrop.” Well ok, so, Mom and I drove to Rock Hill – two and half, three hours – and I played the organ at Winthrop and it was jaw dropping and I could not believe it. The organ that I played for 5 years when I was in high school had two key boards and this had four and all of the stops and this wonderful sound and this, you know just incredible experience of playing. So playing that one organ changed the direction of my college education. I was going to one school and said nope, I want to learn from this instrument and this wonderful teacher.

Dr. Disney: And this was in Byrnes Auditorium?

Shirley Fishburne: Yeah, Byrnes Auditorium. David Larry was my teacher, I mean; he was my teacher-to-be at Winthrop. And so I changed direction in June; two months before I was supposed to start. I went to Winthrop with no scholarships, no scholarships at all. All of the scholarships had already been dilled out and I turned down the scholarships to this other place and changed my mind on that one day of playing at Winthrop. So it really was interesting how that flipped things around.

Dr. Disney: And you had your family support of making that change, which is a big deal. They could’ve said, “No, go where the scholarships are.” A lot of parents do.

Shirley Fishburne: Yeah, yeah. We’ve got four other kids to educate here, you need to do this, but that’s just the way they were. On the big things, they were right on the money, they were right there. Very supportive and they said ok, this is your dream and this is what you need to do. So I came to – wait let me back up to before I got to Winthrop. Those five years of playing the organ at my church were pretty amazing. To be able to do that. Now that I look at it, I can’t imagine a seventh grader doing that. Think of all the things that teaches you. You know, responsibility I had to be there every Sunday. The fact that I was hanging out with all of the older choir members. There was one guy who, he ran the hardware store; every Sunday he had a piece of candy on the organ for me. It was just, “Thanks for doing this, I really appreciate you playing.” So I got so many mentors through that experience and got to work with like-minded folks – people who loved music. So that love of music has guided me throughout my whole educational career. I was very active in the church because of that. One summer the secretary quit, so I thought ok I can do this. I was reading the bulletins so I was, like, in tenth grade. I was typing the bulletins and making sure everybody’s meetings were at the right time. That really teaches a lot. That’s on the job training there. I was in tenth grade and didn’t think anything about. The job needed to be done and it was time to do it. So I was really active in my church

growing up; I was very active in sort of a broader church, the presbytery and got to meet really interesting people through that.

When it came time to come to Winthrop I actually got sick and I had four infected wisdom teeth, got the wrong kind of antibiotic and had a huge reaction to that so I missed the first semester of my freshman year. I got here January of my freshman year and only took like two classes that second semester so I was behind. The whole time I was at Winthrop, I was behind. So I had to go all summers, all the summer schools. So that afforded me an opportunity to be on campus, to be around. I got to meet a lot of people that way. I loved my time at Winthrop; just loved it. It was just the best. I just thought it was great. Coming as a second semester person, one of the girls on my hall said, "Oh God you are so pale; you were just pathetic," because I was. I lost like 50 pounds, I mean it was awful. I was really just this tiny little person, but I still wasn't quite healthy that second semester. But it was kind of fun because all I did was practice organ and go to English class. What could be so bad about that? Those are the two things I love to do – practice and read.

But early education – I can definitely say that experience in playing the organ at my church, that responsibility, and then coming to Winthrop because we got pushed really hard, really quickly. When I was at Winthrop that was the heyday of the organ majors. We had twenty organ majors and now there are maybe one or two. But that pendulum is swinging and I think it will swing back. But just learning from the other students, they were so good; just fabulous students.

Dr. Disney: It's a really strong music program as well.

Shirley Fishburne: Absolutely.

Dr. Disney: So did you have aspirations to go on to become a famous organist, to go to master's school in music? Tell us about the trajectory of that music career, what happened?

Shirley Fishburne: Well, my senior year, the school where I was going, it actually moved. It moved from New York City to New Haven, Connecticut. So they closed it down for a year. So the year that I would've gone to graduate school after I finished at Winthrop, it just didn't happen. So after that year, things kind of changed. You know, a year makes such a big difference in your life. So, I did go on and get my masters. I got the first performance Master's at Winthrop. So that was kind of fun because I was kind of a guinea pig. It was kind of like; let's see if she can do this, maybe-maybe not. But it was a good degree to get. So I have an undergraduate and a Master's in performance from Winthrop. And then from there I went on to the University of North Carolina in Greensboro and got a doctorate in music education. So I figured I needed to kind of expand horizons a little bit and make myself a little more employable

Dr. Disney: And you also taught at Winthrop University, right?

Shirley Fishburne: I did. So I came back after I got my doctorate and taught at Winthrop part time for a lot of years. After I got back to Winthrop is when Cody and I got married.

Dr. Disney: That's what I was going to ask next. Tell us how you met your husband.

Shirley Fishburne: I was a junior at Winthrop and I got a toothache. I went to David Larry who was my organ teacher and my mentor and I said David – I didn't call him David then – Dr. Larry what should I do? And he said you need to go to my dentist and I went to Dr. Fishburne. And he took care of this tooth right here. So then a while later, I get this note on the message board at the school: "Cody Fishburne wants you to call him." I thought Cody Fishburne, I wonder if that's the same person as Dr. Fishburne. I thought, I wonder why Dr. Fishburne is calling me. I know I paid my bill, why is he calling me? And so he asked me out. And after we got together, I said, "Why did you ask me out? Because I'm sure you had a lot of Winthrop students," and he said "I was really impressed that you said you would pay the bill out of your checking account." Good, glad that was a very romantic answer. He was impressed with my financial ability. Cody and I dated for a long time. Cody was 43 when we got married; he had never been married before. He just – it was a big plunge for him. We were married and thirty-five years later it's just been great; just a wonderful relationship.

Dr. Disney: What activities did you get involved in, in terms of family, community? We talked about education and we talked a little bit about employment. Are there any other activities you want to share before and after your marriage, other kinds of activities you got involved in?

Shirley Fishburne: Because of my involvement, and my love of music, I was involved in a lot of arts organizations in Rock Hill. There was a, we used to have what we called a fine arts committee, and it was a wonderful town and gown collaboration between Winthrop and people in the community. I was in an interesting position because I was teaching at Winthrop and I was also involved in the community with a lot of arts things. I served as a chair of that committee for several years and stayed in that organization for a long time. And we went for 25 years; it was a pretty longstanding relationship, that committee. But times change so that has dissolved now. The arts council took some of the responsibilities away. We did a wonderful "Artists in the Schools" program that we did and we chose these wonderful artists who came and worked in the schools – public schools.

Being a musician is a really wonderful profession. It really is. It allowed me to continue to practicing my profession on a pretty high level as my children grew. When our children were very young – we have two daughters. Our daughters are two years apart and they are both very artsy – what a shock. One is a visual artist and one is a musical person. So I was always able to do musical activities that would involve them and their friends. So I taught what was called Orff music. Carl Orff was a music educator who developed a way of teaching that incorporated musical instruments, like xylophones, and glockenspiels, and drums. He designed these instruments for children. When you think of a xylophone, you usually think of a big instrument, well, he made it child sized. It's pretty involved to be certified to teach Orff. I went through all of the certification, which was about three summers of training – three different summers – and taught Orff music at Winthrop for children and had a pretty – well I don't remember how long I did that – pretty much when my children aged out of it and went into other things. That was so much fun; just so fun. I'll have to tell one quick story that's so typical. The little boys in this class – little rowdy boys. The Orff instruments are played – the xylophones, you know the xylophones are played with mallets and I had like, three year olds playing with mallets if you can imagine this. And I couldn't – I couldn't think, ok how can I get them not to use those mallets when I'm talking? And one way I came up with was – ah, I'll tell them bunny ears. I'll tell them to stick the mallets on top of their heads and do bunny ears.

Dr. Disney: That's great; genius.

Shirley Fishburne: It really was. All I had to do was bunny ears and they'd do this. Well at the end of every semester in December and then in May I would have this show-and-tell for the parents. And I've got this really close friend who has two little boys and they were both in this class and they were classic little boys. As soon as I did bunny ears to start the class, you know the dad was sitting in this show-and-tell thing and he just – he just got so mad because he just knew his boys were misbehaving. They weren't misbehaving; they were doing exactly what I asked them to do, but he came over there and just gave them a fit. But, as the children aged, I did children's choirs. So through the Episcopal Church, they had a wonderful choir program. David Larry, again, asked to me come and join his staff over at the Episcopal Church and so I did that for about ten years. I had lots of children from the community who, even if they weren't Episcopalians, they'd come to sing. We took trips; we went to the National Cathedral, we went to Williamsburg. We did a lot of fun things, so it was a bigger circle; much bigger circle. I want the children to experience singing with lots of kids. And so we did some wonderful combined choirs and things. It got me involved in something called the Royal School of Church Musicians and again, the standards just keep getting higher. This is a school of thought that comes out of England and it's a whole program and that's how we ran the program. We had four choir camps at Winthrop during the summer. And this was actually for girls and they were girls from all over the country who would come to Winthrop for two weeks in the summer. And we'd get a director in and an organist and we'd sing in Charlotte. And it was a great experience. I enjoyed it as a profession and also my children were able to experience that and several other children in the community.

Dr. Disney: So you were very active as a musician and your profession and in the community for employment, for camps, for community activities. And you're raising two daughters. So speak a little bit about, if you can, how you were able to balance all the work that you were doing outside of the home with all of the work that you were doing inside of the home as a mom. How were you able to balance everything that you were doing?

Shirley Fishburne: It was -- I had a lady who came and helped me and she was wonderful. Her name was Helen Young. I also taught part-time so I didn't have the committee responsibilities that you have if you're a full time person. I was able to teach and go home. So that was a tremendous difference than someone who teaches full time. The downside of that is that you end up teaching; you end up bringing a lot home. So, there was a lot that I just did at home. You also are not compensated when you're part-time. And so I did part-time for a lot of years and got to the point where, hmm, I think I'm done. Colleges take advantage of part-time instructors. It was wonderful for me because I could do that but when the girls got older and I was ready to go full-time, there was not a position.

Dr. Disney: That's exactly what I was going to say. For women and men, but it seems that mostly women tend to benefit. The part-time employment allows for flexibility when you're raising your kids when they're young, but it also allows for exploitive salaries. The pros and cons to that flexibility of women in the workforce and part-time work.

Shirley Fishburne: Fortunately, Cody was a dentist and the money issue was not a problem. But I were a single mom, I wouldn't have been doing that. I would've been doing something else, for sure. But I was very fortunate in that regard.

Dr. Disney: What does motherhood mean to you?

Shirley Fishburne: Best thing that ever happened to me. It really was. It was just – something that I always to be was a mother. I think that motherhood is one of the most intimate connections that you have with anyone. I still talk to my girls every day. I know that people will think that's crazy, but we're very close. They're in their thirties and I still talk to them every day. You know the beauty of cell phones. I didn't do that when I was growing up because we didn't have cell phones. Had we had cell phones, we would have. But, we're still very connected and it's nice to have adult children. We're really very close. It's a very strong bond. But I think that bond is just so very, very strong with a mother and a child. It really is. And we have our first grandchild and that's a whole new experience. We're loving that and trying to get to see our little fellow as much as we can. The little Cotes.

Dr. Disney: That's great. Talk to us a little bit about how you became a member of the South Carolina Mother of the Year Association.

Shirley Fishburne: Ann Edwards called me up. My husband Cody was on the board of trustees at the Medical University for twenty-five years. And that allowed us to get to know Ann and Jim Edwards. Jim was the President of the Medical University at that time. Two finer people you will never know. They are just the best; such gifted people who are so generous with their time and talents. I got to know Ann and she called me up and said, "Would you be on this committee?" Our children were really young and I've been on the committee for over twenty years. You know when your children are really young, it's hard to go to Columbia and make this commitment, and you know, because there were several meetings every year. I quit once for about two years. She called me back and I was back on. But I have loved it. I have loved that association. I really have. They are just wonderful women and it's allowed me to get to know people throughout the state that I never would have gotten to know.

Dr. Disney: You kind of predicted my next question. How did your membership on this committee impact you, your family, and your community? Talk a little bit about what your membership on the selection committee, selecting mothers of the year; I know you served as chair, you served as treasurer; meeting the other committee members and mothers of the years. Talk to us about the impact that has had on you.

Shirley Fishburne: It's a very humbling experience. These women that we chose were and are amazing women. And when I look at all they've done and I look at all they're children have done, it's truly amazing and some of these women did it on a shoe string. You know that they worked their entire lives, not just in the home, but out of the home. Their children were just incredible, and their grandchildren, you know, it's a ripple effect. I just went to the 90th birthday of one of our women about two weeks ago in Columbia; ninetieth birthday party. I met all of these people; I heard about them – all of these children and grandchildren. She's just so cute – Mary Kate Brearley Glasser; she says that she has ten grandchildren and they each know which finger they are on her hands. So she has ten grandchildren and she has ten great-grandchildren. Ten great-grandchildren! But I met one gal, she's thirty-two and she said "I'm this one; I'm that thumb." So, just to get to meet these people and talk to them is such an amazing experience. The women on the committee are so generous with their time and their talents. They are just so giving. This is just one tiny thing that they do, but they give so much. They really do. It has enriched my life. I can truly say that.

Dr. Disney: Tell us about the work that you and Martha Cranford, the project that you undertook in terms of recognizing seventy years of remarkable women and wanting to produce the book that's there on the table next to you. Talk us through that project a little bit.

Shirley Fishburne: I think that when we realized where we were as an organization that we were not going to be associated with the national organization, and that it was time for us – that times had changed, that women's organizations had changed. We realized that we needed to do something to honor these seventy South Carolina mothers of the year. We toyed with so many different things; we couldn't come up with anything but we wanted something that was lasting. We thought about a sculpture. We thought about a piece of art. We also said that we wanted to give back to these women; we wanted to give something to them and their families and their communities.

We kept knocking around different ideas and we came up with the idea of a book. I know Martha Cranford and I, we always ride together because we're the Rock Hill people – we're the Rock Hill contingent – and on the way back from the meeting that we were discussing this, we kept saying, "well who can we get to write this book?" You know, people do this ghost writing thing. We had some things in Rock Hill where people did a history of Rock Hill and we kept brainstorming on these ideas. It's really dangerous when Martha and I get in the same car, riding together because we – so we kept thinking about different things that we could maybe do as a group and we realized that we had sort of a time frame, kind of a short time frame. The more we drove and the more we talked, I said, "Well, you know Martha, I was the editor of my high school paper, did you ever do any writing?" And she said, "You know, our daughter is an English major; she is an English teacher, so I love to read and write." And I said, "Well, what do you think? Do you think we could do this?" So that's really how the whole thing started. Martha and I were just kind of brainstorming and we kept going, "and it has to be done in how long?" Three months, three or four months.

I have a group that I eat breakfast with on Fridays. Gale DiGiorgio, the President of Winthrop's wife, who's a really good friend of mine; I started talking this idea over with her at breakfast. I said "What are we going to do?" We just kept chewing on the idea. And she said, without even blinking, she said, "You need to call Jennifer Disney." I said, "Well tell me about Jennifer." She started telling me about you and your interest in women's studies, and she said, "She's great; you're just going to love her." And I said, "Well on that recommendation, we're going to call her." So we called you and Martha and I were still in the what-if stage. You know, could we possibly do this. But it wasn't until we talked to you, Jennifer, that we realized this could happen. You helped us crystalize our ideas and get them in an orderly fashion. It was the collaboration with you that made us realize that we could do it. So tell me about women's power. Women's power is feeding off of one another. Seriously, that is the way this book came from a germ of an idea and really worked it into reality.

Dr. Disney: Well, what a beautiful story and now I know that I have Gale to thank for connecting me to you and Martha. Because this has been just a beautiful collaboration and I feel so honored that you would think to invite me into this process with the book.

Shirley Fishburne: Are you kidding me! We couldn't have done it without you! Are you kidding?

Dr. Disney: Well, you brought me such joy and such knowledge and such wisdom. And this intergenerational conversation that we've had across three or more generations, probably four when you think about it. It's been such an honor and I appreciate so much your sharing that story. It really means a lot to me.

Shirley Fishburne: That is really how the ball got rolling. There were lots of times when Martha and I would look at each other and go, "Whose idea was this? This is a crazy idea." But Martha and I have different gifts and we have worked together on different projects over the years and we each know what we bring to the table. And I can tell you that if anybody – if there's a project, I want Martha Cranford on my team.

Dr. Disney: You two are two dynamic women and I will tell anybody, if you want something done, I'll tell you to call Martha Cranford and Shirley Fishburne.

Shirley Fishburne: We work on different calendars. I'm a morning person and she's a night person. So she would send me an email at whatever time and I'd wake up at six and start working on it. So I mean, it was kind of like, ok, she'd give me a task and I'd start working on it. I'd go to bed, send her an email, she'd work on that, and so we had a round the clock working. It was a fun project. It was a hard project, but I'm so glad we did it. It's like most things you do – you kind of dig in, say this is what I'm going to do. You do it, look back, and go, "Whoa, did that really happen?"

Dr. Disney: Exactly. It was a true labor of love. From Ann Edwards and Gale DiGiorgio, to Martha, to you, to me – to all of the amazing women that we read about and that we've subsequently interviewed for this oral history project. We just could not be more thankful.

Shirley Fishburne: The interesting thing about this, and I don't know if Martha told you about it, was we have records on each one of these women. As you go through the process of being chosen as mother of the year, you have to fill out all these forms. The women always tell us that the best part was that our children had to put on paper what it meant to have you as their mother. Can you imagine? Putting down on paper what it meant, what it meant to you to have this wonderful person to be your mother. They said that was the best part and I believe it. I wish I had done that for my mother. You know, I wish I had put it in black and white. There's something about writing something down that makes it more real. We had all these records of seven years of women, but then we had a whole bunch of women we didn't have records for -- about 20 years. And that was a big problem. So Martha being the research person she is – she's so detailed – she started working in the Winthrop Library. We had Winthrop right there, we had the state newspaper archives, and our organization was started by the editor of the state newspaper. So we had some wonderful archives to go by on most women, not all of them. So I tell all of the families of people in there, if your mother only got a short paragraph it's because we just didn't have much information. We really didn't. In order to be equitable, we tried to keep it pretty much the same for each woman because we could've written a book on each woman, easily. But you know, that would've taken a lot longer than we had. We had an end, we had to finish.

Dr. Disney: The research was amazing. I was with Martha looking under the microfilm in those rooms. You two put so much effort into this and it's such a – to have this product, to have it written down. And you added so much. I know Shirley, that you added a lot of the historical, you know, trying to put people into the context of the decades and what was happening in politics

and history at the time. It's a beautiful tribute to these women because it puts them in context to these larger political and historical questions in times in which they balanced home and work and family and motherhood. You should feel very proud of that book.

Shirley Fishburne: We're real pleased. And the other person who played a key part in that was our graphic designer. I don't know if Martha mentioned Clyde Adams, but he was the best.

Dr. Disney: He made that – why don't you hold it up? Just open up one page for people who haven't seen it yet to see what he did with the layout, the way he would lay out a photograph.

Shirley Fishburne: I loved the way he had the timeline. We did it by decades. We decided to do it by decades. But he would have the timeline here of what was happening during that particular time in history. Then we tried to have each woman's picture as much as we could.

Dr. Disney: He would overlay photographs with newspaper articles just like that. I mean, it's unbelievable.

Shirley Fishburne: This one – we had this wonderful picture of these ladies. This was one of our first teas that we had. South Carolina was unusual because we were the only state that would entertain our mothers of the year with a tea at the Governor's Mansion. If you were chosen for South Carolina Mother of the Year, for that year, you got to invite 250 of your closest friends to come to the Governor's Mansion for a tea. I think we started that in the late sixties and that was –

Dr. Disney: And that lasted through the final year that the award was given in the state, right?

Shirley Fishburne: Right. So it was, again, these women just made it happen. These women like Janet Cotter, Ann (?) 46:12, and Callie Wienges. Callie's husband was in the statehouse and she had all of these wonderful receptions. She knew where everything was in the Governor's mansion. She would go, and the Governor's wife would probably not even know where they were. She said now you've got this up in that cabinet and she'd go over there and say, "Yep, that's where it was." And she just knew where stuff was. These were movers and shakers. These women were. They really were.

Dr. Disney: That's one thing I've learned from these interviews. These women were truly movers and shakers in our state.

Shirley Fishburne: Absolutely. These old, wonderful photographs that we have of these women – Clyde took them and just laid them out and they're just beautiful. And what we did to take our living mothers – we wanted to take our living mothers and give them a little bit more exposure. So, we took two pages for each of them and we were able to give a little bit more information about them. He always had where they came from in the state, showed where it was. And then we took their year; each mother, when they would be elected the mother of the year, they would get a call in January. On January the first, you'd get the call that said you have been selected to be the South Carolina Mother of the Year for this year. And after you get through the tears and "you're kidding," then we start preparing them for the year. And in that year they – we told you about the tea, they get to invite folks to the tea – but then they sometimes would go speak throughout the state at different organizations and then we would also encourage them to go to the national convention. So in preparation for the national convention, they had to get a portfolio together. The portfolio – that's what I was talking about – the children had to write about their

mother and things they admired the most. At the end of that calendar year, they would come and present what they had done that year to our committee – the selection committee – and that’s what some of these pictures are here. The ladies would tell us different meetings that they had attended. If they got to go to the national convention, they would talk about that. So we felt like we really got to see what the year meant to them.

Dr. Disney: As chair of the selection committee, for I think three years, you were able to make that call three times on January first. What was that like hearing and being on the other end of that line?

Shirley Fishburne: One lady said, “I’m, I’ll be right back with you. You’re kidding right?” They’re just thrilled; just absolutely thrilled. So it’s a real treat to share that moment with them. It really is.

Dr. Disney: Thank you so much for talking us through that because I think it really helps younger women who are growing up in a generation that won’t have the teas at the Governor’s Mansion, that won’t experience this. You kind of just talked us through what that experience was like for the mothers and for the committee members and I think we’ll have this treasure – this interview – so that can live on.

Shirley Fishburne: Well, I can say that it was such a height to get to meet the friends of the mothers because they were so proud; so proud. Just so proud to know these women and so proud that they got the recognition that they deserved.

Dr. Disney: Do you think that women get the recognition that they deserve in society as mothers, maybe historically and then present day? Think about women’s roles or women’s work as mothers. Do you think we adequately recognize that in society?

Shirley Fishburne: I don’t think – no, I don’t think we do. I think in the family unit we do, but as far as communities, no I don’t think we do. The family unit is imperative. It holds us together as a society. I think that’s one reason we’re not being held together too much right now because the family unit is not as strong as it has been. But I’m not sure if recognition is what we – you know, we’ve talked about it Jennifer and that’s one thing I really was so impressed with and realized that you were going to be a great part of our team. Because you recognized it as such a value – as a woman and as a scholar in women’s studies – because you recognize how important motherhood is to our society. And I thought, “She gets it. She’s going to be a real asset to what we were trying to say.” Motherhood holds everything together.

Dr. Disney: Do you think, I mean you know what you had to do to balance your life as a working mother, a part-time working, community active mother. How do you think women today handle, or struggle, with balancing work and family? Do you think it’s harder? Do you think it’s easier? I mean your daughters, maybe two examples. Just talk a little bit about the generational change and the changes in women balancing work and family.

Shirley Fishburne: I think that – if I can speak for my own children, for my girls – I see more involvement from their husbands. It is more of a team in this next generation, I do think that. I think it is because we raised our sons to be that way. We’ve raised our daughter to, I don’t want to say demand it, but expect it. And I feel like that it’s a real partnership for young couples today. But I do notice that it takes two members working. It just does. It is very unusual when you see a

family that doesn't have both parents working. We were just at Chik-fil-a on Friday and we were all at the little jungle gym part and there were five different groups of people there. Four of them were grandparents with their grandchildren and there was one mother there with her child. I thought that's probably about right. Seriously.

Dr. Disney: That gets back to you saying earlier that it truly takes a village. Especially with both parents working outside the home, it takes a village to raise our children.

Shirley Fishburne: Exactly. Right. I wish – and this is probably jumping ahead of some of your questions – but I wish we had universal child care for everyone to make it easier on family units financially.

Dr. Disney: I was going to mention that. When we talked about does society recognize women's work as mothers, I was going to mention public policy – the area in which you can truly recognize that work or not. So you went right there in terms of a policy choice for our society.

Shirley Fishburne: I think that's one that we are way behind on. Childcare workers are probably paid less than any teacher and that's backwards. It's such an important time in a child's life. In France, the childcare workers are paid like someone with a Master's in Education because they realize how important that early childhood education is. And it's universal. Everybody has childcare and I know your taxes have to go up, but I would pay more taxes for everybody to get the same start. We've had HeadStart and we've had different programs, but it's still not getting at the problem. There are still so many families who do not get the same support that they could.

Dr. Disney: You may already be answering this question, but I'm still going to ask it now. What do you think are the most important issues facing women today?

Shirley Fishburne: I think childcare. I do think that's a major issue. I think women are in the workforce considered equals to a point. I don't think, after you get to a certain level, that women are taken as seriously as men in certain corporation. I'm hoping that's going to change; I think it will. It's an interesting time to be alive. I think it's a very interesting time to see the different changes. I can say that when I was in college, I could have gone into a different field, but it was still most people were teachers or nurses. We didn't have quite the choices that our children do now. There were some who were adventurous and went on and did these things, I just wasn't one of them. I think that our children, because of this partnership that these young families are forming, that they're, they're going to do great things. I really hope so. I'm counting on it.

Dr. Disney: That's a good segue, for me, as my last question: what does feminism mean to you?

Shirley Fishburne: Feminism, to me, means being who you were destined to be. I take that from a female point of view, but also, I have to look at these young men too. I want them to become the people they were destined to be. I just, I don't want – the pendulum has been swinging; it's got to get back to where it's an equal thing. I see a lot of guys who are being overlooked or undervalued for expressing views in the arts and being labeled for that reason and nothing gets my ire up more than that. It's not fair and it's just, why do we have to put labels on anybody? That really upsets me; when a man expresses a very gentle emotion or a sensitive emotion and all of a sudden people turn him off because he's different.

Dr. Disney: Do you think feminism can help us by challenging those gender roles, stereotypes for me and women, and can help liberate boys and girls and men and women to be who they are destined to be, as you put? That's a beautiful definition.

Shirley Fishburne: Yes, absolutely. I did a lot of reading in the seventies and eighties – Betty Friedan, you know, Marilyn French – I did all of that and I loved it, you know, ate it up. But I must say I didn't do it at Winthrop. Winthrop was a sleepy place. It really was. I have to say that.

Dr. Disney: When it came to women's studies and gender and feminism.

Shirley Fishburne: Yeah! I finished in '72, my undergraduate degree.

Dr. Disney: So you had to find it. You went out and found it yourself. It wasn't there. Well I'm happy to say I'm part of the 2000's generation helping to bring it to Winthrop.

Shirley Fishburne: Exactly! You know, I want to take some of your classes for that reason because I feel like that's a gap in my education that I missed; seriously. I just do reading on my own. I talked to a friend of mine who went to Northwestern University – a male – and he was saying that he was marching during the Vietnam War and I said, "Oh dear."

Dr. Disney: You weren't marching here?

Shirley Fishburne: We weren't marching here. We just weren't. We were a very sleepy place. But it's so nice to see Winthrop change. I love it. I really do. I am so proud of that university and everything it represents.

Dr. Disney: I agree; I don't think we're sleepy anymore.

Shirley Fishburne: No, not at all. I just think we're right in there where we need to be. We're serving the community and I'm just so proud of that school.

Dr. Disney: We are so proud to be housing the South Carolina Mother of the Year archives and the oral histories in the Louise Pettus Archives at Winthrop University. And I know you and Martha has the opportunity to choose USC or choose somewhere else and we are so grateful that you chose Winthrop University to be the place to house the many women – many of whom did have Winthrop University affiliations; many had Columbia College and other affiliations in the state. But we are just so pleased that we could be the home for these archives. Thank you so much for reaching out to me, you and Martha, to join this team and bring us this project. Thank you.

Shirley Fishburne: It was just the logical place. Martha and I – it was an emotional decision for us because we love Winthrop so much and we are so proud of Winthrop. But for other members of the committee, it was not a hard sell. They felt like this was the place it needed to be. Winthrop was the school for women in our state and it's where we needed to have this archives. We're hopeful that these records will prompt research. We have some students like Michaela here who will do some research. Who knows what the next chapter will be? That's for the next generation to take. We're honored to be a part of it. We're honored to have you at Winthrop. We really are. Thank you for saying yes.

Dr. Disney: We have the data for Master's degrees and Doctoral dissertations on this project, these thirty-three oral history archive, so I look forward to seeing what the next generation will do with this. Again I just wanted to thank you for getting me involved. Do you have any questions for us or anything else that you would like to share that we haven't covered?

Shirley Fishburne: I mentioned my children, but I don't think I ever mentioned their names, so I think I probably do need to say that. My daughter Ann is married to Will Hamilton and our daughter Mary is married to Jeff Hayden. So I did want to mention both of their names because we love our sons-in-law. We struck it rich when we added them to our family.

Dr. Disney: And your grandchild?

Shirley Fishburne: Cotes; and one on the way.

Dr. Disney: Congratulations. Thank you so much, Shirley. Thank you for the interview.